



The Night Before

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HE got up from his seat by the fire and went over to the window. The woman still stood where the two streets intersected. Again she went through the manœuvres that he had already watched twice. First she made the round of the four corners, peering off in the direction of each of the eight blanched sidewalks. Then she returned to her station under the light, settled her back against the wall, hunched slimly under her umbrella, and waited. All the time the snow continued to fall.

It was the kind of snow that means business, tiny, firm, compact flakes so close together that it was as though a curtain of lace, heavy, thick, exquisitely detailed, was lowered from the sky. In the violet-blue radius of the electric light the snow-flakes looked as hard as rice; beyond they softened and blurred until they veiled the face of the city. The sidewalk was ankle-deep. Each minute the downfall seemed thicker, quicker, solider. A wind had arisen. The windows rattled. Already people were beginning to hold their umbrellas shield-wise in front of them. The man pivoted in the direction of the fire, turned back to the window, drummed intermittently on the pane, pulled down the curtains at both windows, pulled them up again, returned to his seat, resumed his work at the fire. But in a few moments he arose, and hurried over to the window.

The wind had increased measurably. The house shook at intervals. The passing was more rare. The woman still stood

at the corner, her umbrella tilted to a slant. Its upper surface was thick with snow. As he watched she shook off this burden, took another one of her uneasy, watchful strolls about the circle of the four corners, returned to her lookout.

He watched even longer this time, while twice she discharged her umbrella from an accumulation of snow. There was nothing predatory about her; there was even a calm confidence. He resumed his seat at the fire.

His work held him for ten minutes; then he went to the window. The wind was a gale; the very walls shook. Thank goodness! the woman was gone. No, it was only that she was taking another of her four-cornered prowls. Her umbrella, held head-on to the wind, came into the field of his vision first, then her whole figure. She stumbled a little, and as she took her place against the wall her whole aspect seemed to sag. But she stood quiet, fixed. After a moment or two her immobility might have meant that she had frozen to the house.

He pulled his overcoat out of the closet, jerked it on, jammed a cap hard down over his ears, seized an umbrella, and dashed through the silent house. Even the shaking of the walls, the rattling of the windows, had not prepared him for the fury outside. The wind was fairly terrific, but it was evidently of many minds; it tore in different directions. It was not now as though the snow fell

evenly; it was as though it poured down from cornucopias tilted at eccentric angles. He buffeted his way across the street. The woman did not look up as he approached, but perhaps the thick snow blanketed his footsteps. She might have been dozing.

"Excuse me," he said.

Her eyelids lifted. Her eyes looked directly into his. For an instant he got an effect of wonderful luminosity, as though a pair of bright lamps had lighted suddenly in the falling snow. But she was not frightened, only startled.

"I saw you from my window—that is, I have been watching you for a long time," he stammered, "and I began to get worried about you. I had a feeling that you were in trouble—or something—had lost somebody, maybe, and I came over to see if I could help you."

She smiled.

"You are very kind. I have lost something—a man—my husband. I am waiting for him, that 's all."

"I see." But apparently he did not see at all, for he stared at her questioningly. Very likely she guessed that, for immediately she became more lucid.

"It 's such a ridiculous situation! I don't know where to begin, and I should not blame you if you told me I was an awful goose."

"I won't," he encouraged her.

"Well, we got into Boston early this morning. Somebody on the train suggested to my husband a quiet place where we might stay for the night, in a private family. I did not overhear the conversation, and my husband did not happen to mention the street to me. I should n't have remembered, anyway, because I don't know anything about Boston. You see, we 're sailing to-morrow. Besides, although I get along beautifully alone, when I 'm with my husband I always depend absolutely on him. He always insists on taking just the care of me that you would of a child. We went to this house, left our things, and about ten we started to walk down-town, toward the center of the city. We were going to have dinner

in a hotel. I wanted to buy some hair-pins—" For the first time her voice began to quiver a little.

He was afraid she was going to cry.

"Hair-pins," he repeated vaguely.

"Oh, yes." She stopped, and caught control of herself. "I needed them for the boat. I ran across a little shop that happened to be open, late as it was. I told my husband to go on,—he hates waiting for change,—that I would overtake him. When I came out from buying the hair-pins he was not in sight. But I followed the street—oh, for what seemed a long, long way! Probably it seemed longer simply because it was unfamiliar. Anyway, I leaped to the conclusion that I was going in the wrong direction. I turned back on my tracks, and then I lost my head entirely, and began making desperate excursions into the side street. My theory is that he was doing the same thing. We were like buckets in a well. When he was *here* I was *there*, and when I was *there* he was *here*. Anyway, we lost each other; and so I came back to the place where we separated,—I had managed to keep that in mind,—knowing that he would ultimately come back there after me. I 've been waiting hours and hours and hours. What time is it?" she demanded suddenly.

He hesitated.

"About twelve," he answered.

"It began to snow a long time ago. That frightened me, but I did n't dare to leave. You see, I did n't know where to go. I don't know where we 're staying, and I have no money. You don't know how glad I am that you spoke to me, because I was beginning to feel a little frightened." She managed to laugh a little. "And I should like your advice."

He considered the situation. If any sinister interpretation of the man's disappearance occurred to him, he managed to keep guard on his expression.

"You feel sure that your husband will come back here?"

"Oh, yes."

"But in this storm don't you think he might get lost, too?"

"Oh, no; he has an extraordinary sense of direction. It's a sixth sense with him. It's an intuition. He's like a homing pigeon. And then he's traveled and explored all his life. That's helped."

He meditated a moment.

"Do you think I had better call up the police station and tell them where you are in case he should inquire there?"

"The police station?" she repeated. Through her voice surged a dread purely feminine of such a course. "Oh, that might mean getting into the papers!"

"Not necessarily," he reassured her; "I think we'd better do that. Then the instant he calls up they can relieve his mind. He'll know you're safe."

"Safe?" she queried.

"Yes, you must go over and wait in my room. It's big and comfortable, and it's warm there. It happens, though, that nobody but myself is at home. The family have all gone away for the night. I guess I'm asking you to trust me a good deal. Perhaps you'd rather not do that."

"Oh, I do trust you! I shall be very glad to go to your room." Her voice rounded over the reassurance with which she met both of his interrogatives.

"You see," he exclaimed, "if he calls up any police station, my address will be with them; and if he comes back to this corner without doing that, we shall see him from the window."

"Oh, yes, I see." Tremendous relief volleyed into her voice, but at the same time her figure drooped. "I think I'm very cold and tired," she said forlornly.

"And hungry," he added for her. "I'll make you some hot chocolate. It's just opposite."

He closed his umbrella, possessed himself of hers, and, with a hand under her arm, helped her across the street. She leaned against the wall while he unlocked the door; but the warmth indoors effected a temporary revival.

"How luscious this heat is!" she murmured as they passed up the dimly lighted stairs. "Oh, I do hate to be cold! I think I should rather be hungry."

"I would n't," he laughed.

Up-stairs in a big front room he helped her off with her rubbers, her veil, and found the pins in her hat for her. "I'm going to telephone now," he said. "Will you tell me your name?"

She gave it, and he left her.

She made no attempt to take off the long cape she wore. She stood with a bewildered expression, looking about her. The furniture in the room was cheap and innocuous, but clean and ample—a bedroom set in curly maple. It was unmistakably the room of a man; it was unmistakably the room of a very young man. It was unmistakably the room of a very young man in that period when, having established no canons of taste for himself, he feels that he must prove in all his Lares and Penates the virility of his point of view. Boxing-gloves, dumb-bells, a baseball mask indicated an athletic instinct. Beer mugs and tankards testified to a convivial strain. A small collection of novels on a shelf in one corner were all romantically martial in theme. The feminine influence was not lacking. Cushions, a little violent in color and displaying every variation of handiwork, crowded the couch. On the bureau and chiffonier many dainty embroidered linen impedimenta made amusing contrast with toilet-articles, heavily masculine, in ebonized wood. On the walls there were many poster-pictures of pretty girls. At one end was a big trunk, and beside it a box.

How much of this the lady saw is a matter of conjecture. Suddenly she began to sway and sag and slide. When the owner of the room returned, she was a mere crumpled heap of clothes on the floor. He bounded to her side, knelt down, raised her. Again her eyes opened, and again that startling effect of luminosity.

"I guess I was colder and more frightened than I realized." She smiled, but the smile came as the result of a tremendous effort. He helped her to the couch. She lay there still for a while and then, with a sudden recrudescence of energy, stood briskly up.

"Of course you were," he said, watch-

ing her closely. "I 'm kicking myself because I did n't beat it over there before. But you 'll be all right as soon as you have something hot to drink. I 've done the telephoning, and put some milk on the gas-stove. There 'll be some hot chocolate in a little while. You 'd better take off that wet cape."

Her long, gray military cape came off, revealing a surprise. She wore an evening-gown of a transparent, floating gray. It came down to gray satin slippers with silver buckles. She pulled away a scarf, also a transparent, floating gray. Her shoulders, neck, and arms were bare except where a necklace of delicately carved gold dropped pendent topazes that were like ovals of petrified honey; their pendent reflections were like drops of yellow wine on her white skin. Her arms were very slim and long, and so were her hands. Her eyes were large and changing, slate color in the shadow and gray in the light. Her ripply hair, coiled very simply in the neck and thrust through with a yellow satin rose, must once have been dark—a smoky dark. Now, though she was young, it was gray, a brilliant gray, as though here, there, everywhere sparks of silver had been set in the smoke. The tired pallor of her face intensified a certain sculpturesque quality in her features.

He drew the couch over to the fire; he heaped the cushions comfortably.

"Now lie down and take it easy," he begged. "That 's a peach of a sofa. I 'll be back in a jiffy." He poked the fire vigorously and disappeared.

She did exactly as she was told; but her fine, luminous eyes moved languidly over that part of the room which came within the range of her vision. As the result of his vigorous efforts, the fire had come up, beating its way through a thick film of charred paper. From under the pile of pillows which he had thrown on the hearth protruded crumpled sheets of letter-paper covered with writing, stray envelopes, and a photograph or two, face down.

He came in presently with a bowl of steaming chocolate, a plate bearing a por-

tion of cold chicken that still preserved the shape of the tin, some crackers, and some little cakes. He drew a low, jiggly table beside the couch, spread the things out.

"Now get busy," he commanded, "and eat!"

"Oh, I 'll eat," she murmured. "I never was so hungry! You see, I 've had no dinner. And you know so wonderfully just what to do! Men differ so very much in that respect. Old men who 've had a lot of experience are often quite helpless when women go to pieces. But you are extraordinary, and you 're only a boy."

He laughed.

"It 's many years since I was a boy. I 'm twenty-five."

"You don't look that," she commented. "Besides, twenty-five is not a very advanced age."

His look of adolescence was as much a matter of figure as of face. He had carried into the twenties much of the boyish slimness of the teens; yet his figure had the strength of maturity, though he moved as lightly as a cat. His face, however, was not shadowed with even a touch of that maturity. His olive-dark skin glowed with a cleanly athleticism; his tar-black eyes sparkled with it. His look was alert, candid, friendly. He would have been almost too pretty if it had not been for that obvious muscularity and for the scar that gashed upward from one corner of his mouth. A shade of boyish melancholy clouded his face for an instant.

"Sometimes I feel so old! And I have n't got as much speed as I had once. Why, at the gym there are kids that put it all over me running and swimming. They can't any of them box with me yet." He bragged quite openly of that. "I 'm a light-weight—amateur; I fight at a hundred and twenty-nine. That 's how I got that scar." He touched the cicatrice on his upper lip as though it were the decoration of the Legion of Honor. "I 'm never going to stop exercising, though; and if I ever start to run to stomach, I 'll make a hole in the river."

She was sipping the steaming chocolate with a delicate eagerness, disposing of

bites of the chicken with a dainty celerity, nibbling alternately, and with a kind of pretty ferocity, first at a cracker then at a cake.

"That 's right," she approved between bites; "don't stop exercising. I do so hate to see men get unsightly. There 's really no need of it. My husband's figure is superb, and he 's over fifty; but he exercises every morning of his life. You look awfully fit. I know enough about it to guess how you must have worked to develop yourself the way you have."

With a quick athletic pounce, he was on his knees on the floor before her. He lifted to her investigation an upper arm which, flexed, mounded into swelling biceps. "Feel that muscle!" he ordered proudly. Her slim fingers enfolded his arm for an instant. He turned it over so that the ridged triceps manifested themselves. "Feel that!" he commanded exultantly. She obeyed. The arm straightened. He unfastened his cuff, pushed up his sleeve. He thrust his forearm, the fist clenched, nearer for her examination. "How about that?" he demanded triumphantly. The forearm presented a plane of what looked like solid iron covered with satin, stretching from elbow to wrist.

Her slim fingers made experimental, but unsuccessful, attempts to dent this muscular plane.

"That 's wonderful!" she approved. "How you must have worked!"

"I wish you could have seen me when I first went to the gym," he said. "My poor little arms were like sticks, and as for my chest—well, I had just about as much chest as a sick chicken. Everybody was afraid I would get the consumption. But I began to run and swim and box, and the first thing I knew I was the healthiest kid in the place, with some punch in my arm, too. I believe in the healthy mind in the healthy body, you know," he concluded in the tone of one who had come on a great discovery.

"So do I," she said. "I hope you 'll never stop working. Why, in England I have seen men of nearly seventy playing

tennis. Of course they did not look like boys, but neither did they look like old men, and with such fine, straight, slim figures still. I hate fat."

"So do I," he agreed. He took her empty cup and plate from her. "Do you feel better?" he asked politely.

"Oh, much better," she answered. "Thank you again." She arose and walked over to the window. The slim figure in its floating gray gown moved like a wraith through the air. And once quiet against the long, dark window-glass, her draperies seemed to blend with it. The white neck and shoulders and arms, the clean-cut profile, came out like marble. He watched her with the look of one who is unaware that he is watching.

"You need n't worry about that," he said. "I 'll keep my eye on the street. The moment a man appears who seems to be looking for somebody I 'll beat it out and flag him. It 's a hundred to one shot, though, that your signal will come over the 'phone."

"What time is it?" she asked.

"It 's after one," he said, looking at his watch.

Her face seemed to receive a fresh accession of marble pallor.

"You don't think anything could have happened to him, do you?"

"No," he answered; "but I 'll go downstairs and 'phone the police station again. And I 'll call up the hospitals, too."

"Oh, that would be so good of you!" Again that limpid luminosity flared in her eyes.

When he returned she was examining his boxing-gloves.

"I guess you do some exercising yourself," he said, giving the long, slim figure a shrewd, appraising glance.

"I fence a little, I play tennis rather well, I swim very well, and I ride beautifully." She announced this without vanity.

"Gee! I 'd like to see you fence!" he said. "I don't do any of those things except swim. You can't ride in the city, of course, and I always looked on tennis as a kind of girly-girly game."

"Some men do. Oh, but—" she turned the subject quickly—"I 'm very sure you were doing something when you brought me over here. Please go on."

A shade of embarrassment fell across the boyish frankness of his look.

"I was just burning some things up. Sure, I guess I will finish the job if you 'll excuse me for a few minutes."

"Please do!" she entreated. "I 'll be looking at your books."

She moved over to the book-shelf and seated herself in a little chair in front of it. He moved over to the fireplace, squatted on a cushion on the hearth. She began to pull books out from the shelves, looking with obvious interest at the titles and with obvious amusement at the illustrations. He began to feed the fire with the documents that the pillow had partly obscured.

"It 's all finished now," he said after a long interval, and sighed with what was evidently relief. "Won't you come back here to the sofa? It 's ever so much more comfortable."

She arose and swayed over to the fireplace and into the light. Her filmy, gray skirt rippled backward from the long lines of her figure, then closed swathingly in on it. The sheer gray scarf streamed like mist off her shoulders, dropped unheeded to her waist, rested on her slim wrists and on the slight salience of her hip. She seated herself among the cushions. Her shoulders drooped a little, and her chin sank. But her big eyes, flame-filmed, looked directly at him. The light above her head played like a million-pointed silver flame in her cloudy hair. It oozed through the topazes and licked in a dozen golden flames against her white skin.

"What a pippin of a thing that is you 're wearing about your neck!" he said.

Her long, slim hand went up to the golden stones. The golden tongues curled about her fingers.

"My topazes. I 'm very fond of topazes; I bought these in Rome."

"They are just the color of white wine," he commented.

"Yes, I 've often thought that." She unclasped the necklace and handed it to

him. He examined it with great interest. "I think that 's a corking thing," he commented, handing it back.

"What time is it now?"

"After two," he answered, looking at his watch.

"You *don't* believe that anything has happened to him?" she entreated.

"No, but I 'll find out for sure again." With a single impulse upward, his hands not touching the floor, he was on his feet again. He bounded with his quick, light step out of the room and down the stairs. "No, he 's not been heard from at the station or at the hospital," he announced cheerfully, returning in a few minutes.

"I can't understand what 's keeping him." She looked somberly out into the whirling white heart of the storm. "If I could only get to a hotel; but I don't suppose a taxi would venture—"

"No." He shook his head so decisively that his thick black hair divided. He tossed it into position again.

"And, besides, I have no money."

"Oh, money!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I can give you some money, of course."

"Well, then just as soon as it lets up a little—"

"I 'll take you anywhere you want to go," he promised; "but there is no reason why you should n't stay here. He 's bound to find you. And there will be nobody in this house all night long."

"But I 'm keeping you up," she said.

"I 'm enjoying it," he asserted roundly. "I 'm having the time of my life."

"But to-morrow you 'll have to work," she said regretfully.

"To-morrow!" he said and started.

"To-morrow—" He paused abruptly.

"I 'm not going to work to-morrow.

To-morrow I 'm going—" He paused abruptly again. A strange expression came into his eyes, a strange smile played across his lips. "And to-morrow you 're going to sail somewhere, are n't you?"

"Yes, to Italy—to wonderful, appealing, endearing, romantic, colorful, beautiful, heartbreaking Italy." She lifted her long arms above her head in a sudden un-

control as though she could express her feelings about Italy only in gesture. "I've lived five times in Italy, and oh, how I love it! I don't know which I love most, the ruins or the gardens. There's one garden—oh, how I wish I could take you to it this very instant! It's on the Aventine Hill. It's not such a very big garden, but such a wonder! We go in through a big, massive door, oh, so heavy and huge! and there, stretching before us, are parallel hedges of box so high that even a giant could not see over the top. And we would walk straight between those hedges and come out on a big, round pool, with a fountain in the center where ferns grow and where the sunlight, trembling on the water, is thrown up in quivers of gold on the fern. And all about everywhere are bushes cut into strange formal shapes like carved jade, and daisies with hearts of gold and petals of pink. And on one side of the pool a huge yellow cat with green eyes is playing with leaves, and on the other side a huge white one with blue eyes is nursing her kittens. And beyond the pool is the parapet, and beyond the parapet, oh, 'way, 'way off, like a monstrous, blue, bell-shaped bubble set in the sky, is the dome of St. Peter's. And below the parapet—many many feet below—lies beautiful, pearly Rome and the Tiber, like molten brass. Would you like to see that garden?"

"Would I?" He laughed, but his laugh was rich with assent.

"I could take you to many other gardens quite as wonderful, most of them bigger though—gardens in Italy, gardens in France, gardens in England, and gardens all over the Orient. I've made a collection of secret gardens. One of the most beautiful is in San Francisco, a quaint, shaded little spot full of hedges and trees and bushes and lovely old mossy, lichened, vine-grown, weather-stained, broken-nosed statues, and all this running very slowly up hill until suddenly at the top you look out on the great greeny-golden, foam-laced, palpitating Pacific. Would you like to see *that* garden?"

"Would I?" he said again. "You make

it sound like things I read and pictures I saw in fairy-tale books when I was a child." He stared at her again. But now his look of perplexity was conscious. "Tell me about the ruins," he said. "You said you did n't know which you liked best, gardens or ruins."

"I love ruins. The ruins of Italy are beautiful, but, oh, they are nothing to the ruins of Egypt. And I've seen ruins in Ceylon and Japan and Yucatan. Imagine, in Africa, for instance, there rises straight out of the desert, all alone, nothing else about, an amphitheater bigger than the Colosseum at Rome. And everywhere these ruins are all vine-grown and flower-grown—oh, such colors and oh, such shapes! And by moonlight— You see, what makes them wonderful is that not all of them is there—dear, tender, broken things. But they suggest, oh, how they suggest! They give your mind a starting-point, and from that it builds—oh, gorgeous shapes—the walls and towers of dreams. Can you understand that—that it's the fact that they're broken and old and overgrown and stained and tragic that they are so much more wonderful?"

"Yes, I understand," he said instantly. He meditated on these strange, new ideas. But "You must have traveled a lot," was the only fruit of his thought.

She was leaning forward now, her long arms partly hidden by her gray veil, like white flower-wreaths, her long fingers loosely clasped like white lily-petals. All the firelight concentrated in her wide gray eyes and in the reflections which dripped from her topazes.

"Yes, I've been everywhere so many times that I've almost lost count. You see, my husband is a tramp by nature, and I'm a Gipsy. We never stay in one spot long. I've been uprooted so many times that sometimes I think I have no roots left. I hope I have n't. I never know when my husband is going to start off, but I have learned now that when railroad and steamship folders begin to pour in through the mail he's planning another long trip. Have you ever read the life of Lady Isabel Burton?"

"No," he said regretfully. "I don't read very much," he added in shamefaced explanation.

"Well, we're a little like Sir Richard and Lady Isabel, my husband and I. David is a great big giant of a man, red-headed, and with a red beard, strong as a lion, and looking a little like one. What brought us together was, I think, our love of wandering. It's very amusing the way our life is conducted. Sometimes he'll be away from me, and he'll get an order to go off on a long journey. He'll have to start first. Then he always writes the way Sir Richard did, 'Pay, pack, and follow!' Oh, it's such fun! I can get ready the quickest of any woman you ever saw even when I have a house on my hands. We're such a queer pair! When we're gipsying, he always does the cooking, for instance; he's a much better cook than I. But if anything goes wrong with his camera, type-writer, or bicycle, I always take it apart and fix it. I have a passion for machinery and an understanding of it. It's very wonderful our life. You see, our temperaments and abilities are very different, but our tastes are the same. Always each wants to do what the other wants to do. Oh, it's such fun being together! We're just like two children; it's never changed any from the very beginning." There came a flash of silver fire from between her dark lashes, a flash of white fire from between her red lips: those two flashes made her smile.

The puzzled, intent look in her companion's eyes exploded in understanding.

"Why," he exclaimed, "you're beautiful, are n't you?" And he said this with the naïveté of a child who has made an astonishing discovery in regard to the world. "I did n't realize that. I thought beautiful women had to look like that." He pointed to the posters on his walls.

She smiled with a charming, almost tender understanding.

"I'm glad if you think me beautiful," she said entirely without coquetry. "I certainly don't look like any of them." She studied the pretty girls with amusement.

"No, you don't," he agreed, "but I guess that's only because you're more beautiful. Don't other people tell you that?"

"Not many. Sometimes a painter or a sculptor," she turned it off easily.

"Do you know," he went on, "this is the first time I ever sat in a room with a lady in a dress like that. Of course I've seen them on the stage and in pictures and in audiences. I think it's beautiful."

"I looked at your books while you were out," she glided easily away from this personal strain. "You like books with adventure in them, don't you?"

"Sure," he answered. "The more fighting in them the better. I like detective stories, too."

"Do you like poetry?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "I never read any except what was in the reading-books in school."

"Well, let's find out. How do you like this?" She recited a poem to him.

"I think it's beautiful," he answered the instant she finished; "but perhaps it's the way you say it and the way you look when you say it. Who wrote it?"

"An Englishman named Keats. What did you like about it?"

"That part about 'shed no tear.'"

"Shed no tear—oh, shed no tear!

The flower will bloom another year,"

she quoted. "Well, let's try another. How about this?" She recited another poem. "What do you think of that? Do you like it?"

"Oh, I do," he answered as directly as before. "I should think it was written about you—that part, 'And loved the sorrows—' I can't remember the rest."

"How many loved your moments of glad grace,

And loved your beauty with love false
or true,

Still one man loved the pilgrim soul
in you,

And loved the sorrows of your changing
face,"

she gave it back to him.

"If I was going to write a poem about you, that 's what I 'd say," he declared. "Was it written about you?"

She laughed with a note of gaiety that she had not hitherto shown. "I wish it was, but it was n't. That was written by an Irishman named Yeats."

He brightened.

"I 'm Irish," he said. "At least, I was born in Boston, but my father and mother came from Ireland."

"That explains you," she said. "Did you know that the Irish are a race of geniuses? They can do everything and anything. Probably you have a genius for something that you don't know anything about. Perhaps it 's writing poetry. If you like that verse of Yeats, let me tell you about a little play he wrote called 'The Land of Heart's Desire.' I 've taken part in it so many times that I know it almost by heart." At her gesture of invitation, he seated himself on the couch beside her. She placed a pillow comfortably at her neck. Then gazing at him straight, as though watching the effect she began to recite:

"Because I bade her go and feed the calves,
She took that old book down out of the
thatch."

For a moment after she had finished the silence remained unbroken.

"I never heard anything like that," he said finally. "I did n't know—" He arose and poured some coal upon the fire from the hod, but he moved as though in a dream. He seated himself again. "I 've always thought poetry was foolish. I feel as though I 'd been 'way off somewhere—into some strange place, or I had dreamed. I don't know how I feel."

"It 's just the effect of beauty on your Celtic soul," she explained, smiling.

"What part did you take in it?"

"*Maire*."

"I would have liked to see you."

"Perhaps you can sometime. I 'll send you a copy of the poem from London, if you 'd like it."

"Oh, I would."

She arose abruptly and started for the window.

"He 's not come yet," he said. "I 've had my eye out the window all the time."

"What time is it now?"

"Four o'clock."

She made a gesture of despair.

"Oh, I am so worried!" she wailed. Then added: "But let 's not talk about that. I feel so dreadfully about keeping you up. You say you are going to have a holiday to-morrow. What are you going to do?"

His face changed; for a moment he did not speak.

"I 'm going to be married," he said finally.

"*Married!*" she exclaimed, and then again, "*Married!*" and for the third time, "*Married!* Why, you *child!* Oh, you 're too young!"

"At twelve o'clock," he answered with a tone of finality. He moved over to the chiffonier, removed from its top a picture in a silver frame. "Here she is," he told her.

She studied the face that stared up at her from the silver circlet, and her own face changed subtly. It was a very young girl, with a superficial prettiness of curly, light hair, tiny roundnesses of feature, tiny smallnesses of figure. But there was a something disappointing about it—a something of meagerness of spirit, of insipidity of line; a something of jaw too narrow, of lips too thin, of nose too pointed; a something that, unseen at first, grew in strength until it vanquished the last suggestion of prettiness. "She 's only a child, too," she commented, handing the picture back. "And just think it 's your wedding-day and hers now! When you tell her about to-night, give her my very best wishes, and tell her that I know she 's marrying a man who will always take the best of care of her."

His face changed a little as though involuntarily.

"Perhaps you won't tell her?" she questioned.

"Oh, yes, I 'll tell her."

"But she won't like it?"

He hesitated, and obviously tried to evade the answering.

"No, she won't like it," he admitted finally as though he could not help it. And then again, as though under compulsion of her silence, "She does n't like me to be with any other girls. I never do if I can help it."

"Oh," she said sorrowfully, "I 'm so sorry to be making trouble for you!"

"It won't make very much trouble, or it won't last very long. And, besides," he added strangely, "I don't care. I shall keep the memory of this. It has been beautiful." He paused, then there came from him in a rush: "She does n't like a lot of things I do. Boxing! She thinks there 's no class to boxing." He stared at her in helpless question. "She does n't want me to go to the gym any more. What you said about marriage—liking everything the other one wants to do, we 're not like that."

She took the necklace of topazes from her neck.

"Give her this," she ordered, "and tell her they are from a friend."

Obedient, he took the necklace and stood a little dazed, looking at it.

Then the telephone rang and he vanished down the stairs. She stood very straight and tense in the position in which he left her.

"It 's your husband," he said. "He was knocked down by an automobile while you were in the store. He 's all right," he added swiftly as her face contorted. "He 's on the way now in a taxi. He 'll be here in a minute; they took him into

a house just a few blocks away. He told me to tell you that he was *all right*."

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Well," he admitted, "I 've been lying to you all the evening, telling you it was earlier than it was; I was so afraid you 'd worry. It 's nearly seven."

He helped her on with her rubbers, her scarf, her long cape. He handed her her hat-pins one at a time as she stood before the glass adjusting her hat.

Finally she turned, held out both hands.

"Good-by, my dear boy!" she said. "For you are only a boy, but a dear, dear boy. Tell me your name."

He told her his name.

Quite simply, but still holding his hands, she raised herself on tiptoe and kissed him.

"You dear!" she said tenderly.

Then the door-bell rang. "Good-by, boy," she said, and ran down the stairs.

ALONE, he took up the picture in the silver frame. He looked at it for a long time, his face expressionless; but he kept shifting it into different lights, turning it at different angles. It was as though he was studying it feverishly from a new point of view. It was as though he was searching it frantically for something he had lost. He did not find it, for finally he dropped it, face downward on the chiffonier, and his features broke in something like panic. He controlled that in an instant; then very slowly he walked through the hall to the bath-room, turned on the water in the tub, took out his razor, began methodically to strop it.

